



A YEAR IN REVIEW 2013 - 2014

McKinley Community PLACE MATTERS

July 2014

OUR HISTORY

At the end of June 2013, our journey to addressing the health injustices and silence related to the uranium legacy in McKinley County began.

A few weeks later, four team members ventured to our first Action Lab hosted by the Joint Center for Economic and Political Studies and CommonHealth Action. Upon returning, we finalized our vision and mission statements, which are built on the foundation of the McKinley Community Health Alliance.

Our mission states that through using a health equity lens, the McKinley Community PLACE MATTERS team seeks to change systems that perpetuate environmental health disparities related to the impacts of institutional racism and multigenerational trauma, by empowering participating communities within the county to impact equitable policy change.

Our approach is a non-hierarchical structure through establishing shared leadership, and creating a safe space for honest discussions to emerge about difficult subjects particularly related to environmental justice and race relations.

History Continued on

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Northeast Church Rock Mine Site

Vision Statement

Our vision is all people in McKinley County will live in a safe, healthy, and prosperous environment that honors health in all policies and leaves a legacy of responsible leadership grounded in equity.

OVERVIEW

More than a year has passed since we decided to work on the uranium legacy in McKinley County and conduct a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). Shortly after our HIA training in November 2013, we began working closely with the Red Water Pond Community, who are living at ground zero of the historical spill site and abandoned mine sites. Shortly after the first of 2014, we hired a Community Engagement Specialist, Philmer Bluehouse.

His professional background is in Criminal Justice where he specialized in criminal investigations. He also designed, developed and implemented the Navajo Peacemaking Division under Chief Justice Tom Tso and remained in this position until 1999.

Philmer believes our aboriginal knowledge of healing is used in our justice ways and has repeatedly remarked that, “Navajo knowledge of justice is a healing way and not a punitive way.” He believes, “Knowledge is power and knowledge is healing,” which he advocates for in his teachings and presentations.

Philmer has done extensive research in the Diné culture and traditions. He is a traditional medicine practitioner who uses the Sacred Mountain Bundle (Aboriginal Constitution), Protection Paraphernalia, Mountain Tobacco, Corn Pollen and Diagnosis Ways. Through this practice he has become stronger and advocates for the protection of the environment. He brings extensive knowledge about the Navajo Nation Fundamental Laws, which are a central component to all our work with the community.



HIGHLIGHTS

Since our first PLACE MATTERS meeting in September 2013:

- Hosted Northwest Regional Health Impact Assessment Training.
- Developed a website and social networking presence.
- Participated in two public forums on uranium mining hosted by our partners Conservation Voters of New Mexico Education Fund.
- Began regular meetings with Red Water Pond Community Association and White Shell Women.
- Hosted a Statewide PLACE MATTERS and Health Impact Assessment gathering in June 2014, which included a site visit to historical spill site and Red Water Pond Community.



University of New Mexico BA/MD Students

Working with Students

Since beginning our initiative, we have the pleasure of working with social work interns from Western New Mexico University – Gallup. They have been instrumental in moving our work forward.

During the month of June 2014, students from the BA/MD program at the University of New Mexico assisted with our health impact assessment. They presented this work at their closing reception and will be sharing the information in August 2014 to students in the program, faculty and other community partners.

On the Horizon

In the Fall of 2014, we will complete our Health Impact Assessment on uranium mining. We have identified a Research Assistant and a Epidemiology Assistant to contract with and provide assistance with completing our HIA.

On July 19, 2014, we will participate in the Annual Red Water Pond Road Community uranium tailing spill commemoration. It will be the 35th anniversary of the uranium tailing spill.

In the Fall of 2014, Philmer will begin teaching capacity building courses to strengthen our community leadership power.

We are exploring our next project of looking at the inequities in relation to homelessness and substance abuse.



Action Lab 5 in Atlanta, GA

Jordon Johnson, Philmer Bluehouse,
Ophelia Reeder, and Sheila Ferris

McKinley Community



PLACE MATTERS

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There is an understanding amongst our team members that this work is a life-long process, which allows courageous conversations to emerge about white privilege, institutional racism, and multigenerational trauma.

Upon launching our initiative, the core team decided to focus on the health inequities in relation to the uranium legacy primarily in the Church Rock area. In 1979 at the United Nuclear Corporations' uranium processing mill in Northwest New Mexico, a dam broke releasing more than 1,100 tons of uranium mining wastes-tailings along with 100 million gallons of radioactive water into the Pipeline Arroyo and went downstream along the Rio Puerco. The "Church Rock Tailings Spill" is the second largest accident in the United States that released radioactive materials.

Working with Our Partners

Red Water Pond Road Community Association:

We have been meeting with the community on a regular basis to build their capacity as leaders. We are in the process of building a Hogan with them to be utilized as a place of healing and hosting community gatherings.

McKinley Community Health Alliance: We

provide monthly updates to the health alliance about work and HIA.

Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining:

We work together to monitor any legislation on the Navajo Nation in regards to proposed mining efforts.

Conservation Voters of New Mexico Education

Fund: We have partnered with CVNM to move forward equitable policy initiatives regarding uranium especially in relation to health

Multicultural Alliance for Safe Environments: We

are beginning to build our relationship with this coalition of multiple partners.

Navajo Birth Cohort Study: We have connected with the study and partners since this study is about the health impact of uranium.

Community Meetings for our HIA: We have been hosting community meetings at Chapters to inform people about our HIA.

New Mexico Health Equity Partnership:

Participated in multiple peer to peer learning opportunities with NMHEP and other PLACE MATTERS teams.